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ABSTRACT

Described is the Occupational Conditioning Center Program, a vocational education program in which moderately to severely retarded persons are taught proper work attitudes and basic industrial skills. Program goals are said to include: exposing students to simulated work situations, giving students an opportunity to work in cooperation with others, teaching fundamentals of personal and collective safety in a simulated work situation, and providing staff with adequate opportunities to evaluate students' potential for future skill training and employment. Means for implementing program goals are described: regulating the day's activities by an industrial time clock; developing an educational prescription for each student; using simple assembly lines as work task situations; drilling students in safety skills, such as use of the fire extinguisher; and using audio-visual aids to teach students a basic vocational vocabulary. Procedures for referring students to sheltered workshop or competitive employment situations are explained. Review of the program's first year is thought to show that pre-employment training has resulted in a smoother and more successful transition into the working force for the program's 20 trainable or educable mentally handicapped students. (GW)

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A PILOT PROGRAM IN OCCUPATIONAL EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

BOARD OF EDUCATION · UNION, NEW JERSEY

Spring 1970

A Pilot Program Occupational Education for Students With Special Needs

A Report By
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O.C.C. Instructor

N.J. Department of Voc. Ed.
Programs for Special Needs Students

Grant #39.224

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SPECIAL TRIBUTE

It is with profound appreciation that we extend our heartfelt thanks to Dr. Robert M. Worthington, Assistant Commissioner of Education and New Jersey State Director of Vocational Education for his foresight, understanding and support of this project.

The Special Needs Program of Employment Orientation for Handicapped Students under the direction of Dr. Worthington has permitted Union Schools to offer retarded and disturbed students the first opportunity to prepare for a truly purposeful contribution to society and to develop a positive self image that is the basic entitlement of every citizen.

The immediate day to day advice of such Vocational Division staff members as Mr. John Wyllie, Mr. Louis Sarandoulias, Mr. Dean Garwood, Mr. Harold Seltzer, Mr. John Glass and Mr. Thomas McNulty enabled Union to design, prepare and execute the total program which now services students from six districts in four counties.

FOREWORD

For persons devoting their careers to assisting the handicapped child, this booklet will provide both inspiration and direction in terms of trainable and low educable students. Personnel familiar with the difficulties of occupational training and successful employment will be especially interested in it's contents.

The Occupational Conditioning Center provides meaningful opportunities for educational, social and vocational skill training to older students for whom the regular classroom holds little hope of meaningful achievement. Confronting the reality that the traditional program held little for the adolescent low educable and trainable student is what precipitated the structuring of the program you are about to see and feel explained in the following pages.

Purposeful activity is being engaged in by youngsters whose I.Q. is difficult to establish. There are youngsters profiting by this program whose I.Q.'s are in the 30's, 40's, 50's and 60's. Their response to the project components has been remarkable. Some have moved on to Sheltered Workshop placement and others are viewed as being future candidates for such placement as well as the possibility of competitive employment.

The techniques, the activities, the strategies, the procedures being developed in this program can be applied in other districts to other disabilities with the same hope of success. There is quality control and an assessment quantitively of the increased proficiency of each youngster as he moves through the program of skill training and socialization.

We are most grateful for the opportunity provided by the federal government through the Special Needs Programs of the Vocational Education Division of the State Department of Education, reinforced and supplemented by grants under Title VI of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. We are indebted to the personnel of the Vocational Division and the Bureau of Special Education and Pupil Personnel Services of the State Department of Education. Mr. Paul Porado in the Bureau of Special Education and Mr. Louis Sarandoulis and Mr. John Wyllie in the Division of Vocational Education provided continuous encouragement and support in the structuring and in the implementation of this program.

PREFACE

In recent years, educators and rehabilitation agencies have begun to realize that the major problem in the employment of the handicapped was not the skills needed but rather the attitude of the employee toward his work situation. Employers were willing to train employees in the skills needed to perform the work task, but later found they had to release the employee due to work related problems. Workers could not follow directions, did not work the full work period due to a short attention span, or could not get along with their supervisors or fellow workers.

This program, the Occupational Conditioning Center, is a result of the awakening of educators to the needs of that group of the handicapped work force who fall into the category of moderate to severely mentally retarded. The purpose

is to prepare this group of handicapped students for employment, first through a development of proper work attitudes, and secondly through the development of basic industrial skills.

INTRODUCTION

The Occupational Conditioning Center Program is funded by a grant under the special needs section of the Vocational Education Division, New Jersey Department of Education. The grant was received on September 1, 1968 enabling the program to open.

With the aid of a Title VI-A grant, the summer months of 1968 were used to test and evaluate students prior to acceptance into the program, as well as provide for the installation of equipment and renovation of the physical facilities.

Students from throughout Union County as well as Union Township were screened for acceptance into the program. The opening of school in September found the program enrollment consisting of four (4) trainable girls, ten (10) trainable boys, four (4) educable

girls, and two (2) educable boys, a total enrollment of twenty (20) students. The students come from seven (7) different school districts with some students traveling as many as 20 miles to school.

OBJECTIVES OF THE PILOT PROGRAM

The main objective of this program is to provide a period of occupational preparation and conditioning for mentally retarded students through exposure to a simulated industrial environment.

Several other objectives serve as a vehicle for the successful completion of the main objective. These are listed in the program proposal as:

I. To expose the student to simulated work situations;

II. To give the students an opportunity to engage in pre-vocational explorations;

III. To give the student an opportunity to work in cooperation with others;

IV. To learn the fundamentals of personal and collective safety in a simulated work situation;

V. To provide the professional staff with an opportunity to evaluate the student's potential for future simple skill training;

VI. To bridge the gap between basic special education classes and future simple skill training;

VII. To identify those students who may become competitively employable, marginally competitively employable, and those who will be employable only in a sheltered situation.

IMPLEMENTATION OF A PROGRAM DESIGNED TO REACH THESE OBJECTIVES

I. To expose the student to simulated work situations.

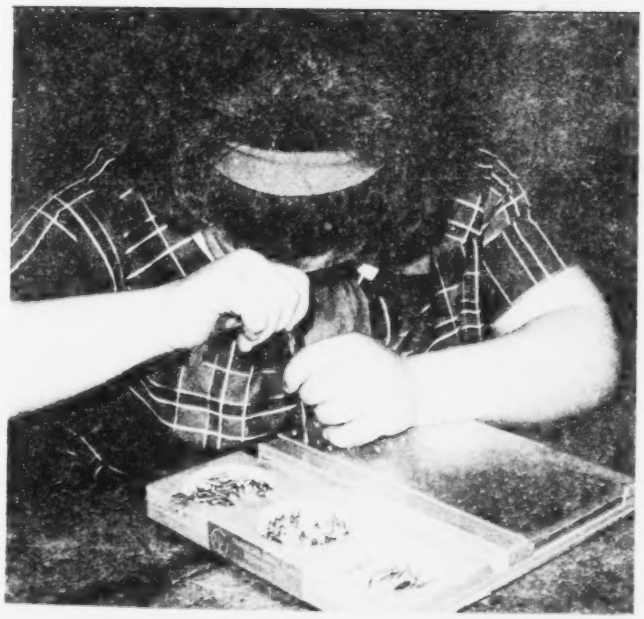
The setting of the program is a 1600 square foot room with equipment and furniture arranged to simulate an industrial work area. The day's activities are regulated by an industrial time clock. 'Punching in' soon becomes a regular habit with the students and is correlated to industrial time clock procedures.

Reasons for punching, and the time card itself, are explained and discussed. The time clock, just as in industry, announces the arrival of break or rest time, lunch time, and the start and end of the work periods.

Although the main objective of the program is to have the student become familiar with and adjust to the industrial atmosphere, it is recognized that the trainable mentally retarded student is lacking in many of the basic skills necessary for employment. In this program the industrial atmosphere is used to provide a setting in which these basic skills can be improved to the point that the student is employable.

II. To give the students an opportunity to engage in pre-vocational explorations.

Through a program of testing and



evaluation, an educational prescription is developed for each student. A work program is then designed for each student, based on his individual educational prescription. These work programs are designed to use basic tasks to develop competency in a given area of the student's ability. The following list illustrates typical work tasks and their developmental objectives.

WORK TASK	DEVELOPMENTAL OBJECTIVE
Assembly of large nuts and bolts	Gross hand and finger control, coordination between the hands, hand-eye coordination, and the development of finger dexterity.
Assembly of medium and small size nuts and bolts	Further refinement of the students' hand-eye control and finger dexterity.
Copying peg board designs	Color recognition and discrimination, pattern retention, hand-eye coordination and finger dexterity.

WORK TASK	DEVELOPMENTAL OBJECTIVE
Sanding and filing a piece of wood	Development and refinement of gross motor control, arm movements, and development of tactile sensory recognition.
Sorting of items according to size	Development of the ability to discriminate between sizes and shapes of items.

One objective common to all work tasks is that of developing the student's abil.ty to concentrate on his task for an extended period, eventually working for a period of time equal to a standard industrial work period.

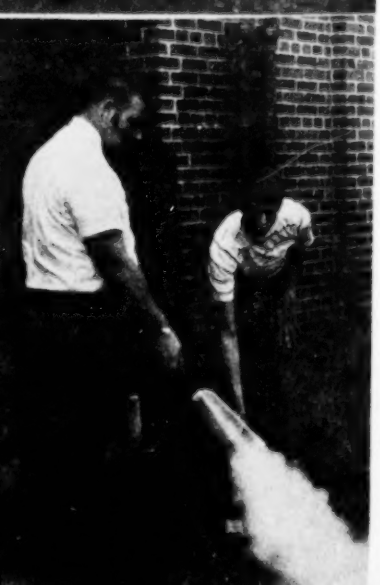
III. To give the student an opportunity to work in cooperation with others.

As a student's ability increases each is moved into a work situation involving two or more students in a simulated assembly line. Using simple assemblies as a work task, the students learn to work with others and to understand their responsibility as a member of the work team. Workers in the assembly line have produced five different booklets including this report, golf tees, Christmas cards, windshield ice scrapers, and engraved name plates for all teachers in nine of Union Township's Public Schools.

IV. To learn the fundamentals of personal and collective safety in work situations.

As each trainee becomes capable of more complex tasks, he works on various pieces of equipment in the work area. A vital phase of his preparation is the development of a safe work routine along with an understanding of the safety procedures commonly used in industry.

The work area has safety signs, both protective and directive, wherever appropriate. The meaning of the various



signs is discussed at regular intervals to ensure the student's understand the meaning of each sign. A non-skid paint is used on the floor surrounding the machines and work areas. Each machine has a pair of goggles nearby to aid in the development of good eye safety habits.

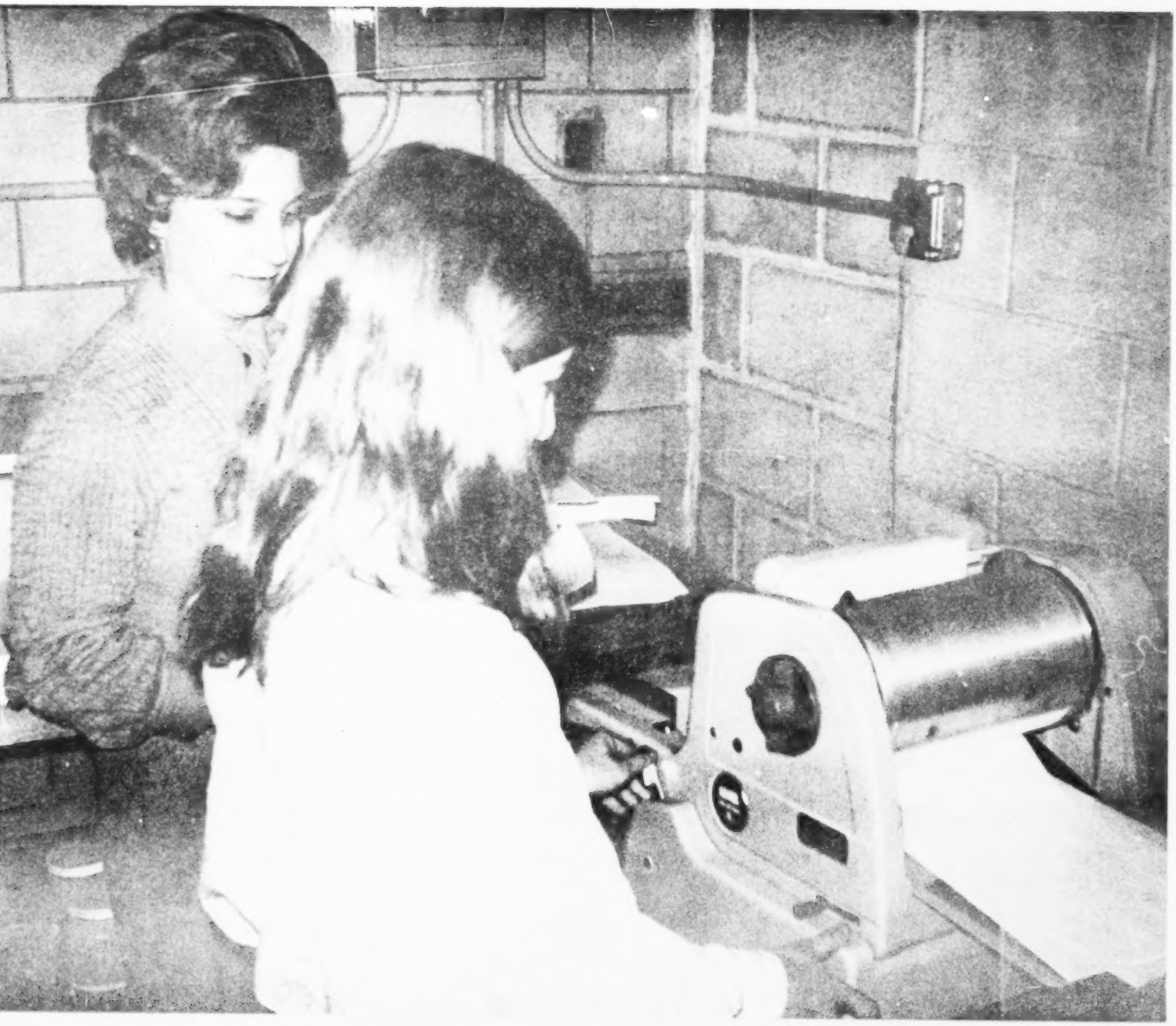
Once each semester the students are given a demonstration on the use of the fire extinguisher. This lesson is presented by a member of the Union Fire Department whenever possible, and is designed to give each of the students an opportunity to discharge the extinguisher. This enables the students to touch and feel the fire extinguisher in operation, which reinforces the learning situation. This lesson is also accompanied by a discussion of fire prevention. Each of the extinguishers in the work area are marked according to the acceptable standards of the Safety Council, and all exits are marked with appropriate EXIT, FIRE EXIT, or

EMERGENCY EXIT signs.

Whenever the school holds a regulation fire drill, the students in the Occupational Conditioning Center participate in learning proper group behavior in an emergency.

V. To provide the professional staff with an opportunity to evaluate the student's potential for future simple skill training.

As the students work they are observed and evaluated by the instructor and school psychologist. Periodically the counselor from the Rehabilitation Commission will visit the program and observe the progress of the older students who may be referred for service at the end of the year. The opportunity to visit and observe students at regular intervals has resulted in close cooperation between the school system and the Rehabilitation Commission. During



the five week summer program in 1969, we accepted a cerebral palsy client for the purpose of providing an occupational evaluation in specific areas for the Commission.

The Occupational Conditioning Center is operated in such a way that when a visitor enters the room, the students go on with their work and the visitors are provided with the opportunity to observe the students as they work and as they socialize during the break periods.

VI. To bridge the gap between basic special education classes and future simple skill training.

The various work related areas in the shop are being continually correlated with the work in the academic phase of the program. Telling time is linked to punching the time clock and to their rest or break periods; knowledge of coins as well as basic math is

reinforced each time a student receives his pay for completing a task; mathematics is again reinforced as the students count items on the assembly line or check the pages in a book they are assembling. This constant correlation shows the student the importance of doing his best in the academic class.

A program has been proposed and funded through the State Program for Teacher Innovation which is designed to teach the trainable student a basic vocational vocabulary through the use of an electronic flashcard reader. The words will be presented to the student in such a manner that both the visual and auditory senses will be stimulated. The student will then repeat the word and in turn be able to hear his voice as it was recorded. He will be able to hear the master recording of the word along with the recording of his voice. The words will also be presented by means of a pictorial representation. It is felt that the stimulation

of multiple senses will result in greater retention and the word will be retained regardless of whether it is spoken or printed. This project will be developed and tested within the Occupational Conditioning Center program.

VII. To identify those students who may become competitively employable, marginally competitively employable, and those who will be employable only in a sheltered situation:

Throughout their tenure in the Occupational Conditioning Center, students are being evaluated to determine their potential as future members of our industrial work force. The culmination of their training occurs, when it is determined that they can no longer benefit from the type of training this program offers. At this point there are three avenues through which the students may leave the program.

A. Vocational education in the high school: Students who possess the ability to go on to further training may be enrolled in the vocational education department of Union High School. In this program the student will attend the vocational program and work in a specific area during one half of the day. The remaining half day is spent with a special education teacher who concentrates on verbal and numerical skills. If the student continues to progress and succeed, he may be moved into the cooperative education program and possibly into full time employment.

B. Sheltered competitive employment: Students who have reached their maximum training level in our program and are capable of employment in a sheltered situation outside of a sheltered workshop may be placed with the cooperation and guidance of the

Rehabilitation Commission. In such a case, the school as well as the Rehabilitation Commission will provide a continuing followup to ensure the success of the placement.

C. Sheltered Workshop employment: Students possessing only the basic skills and attitudes are referred to the Rehabilitation Commission after detailed evaluation and parent conferences. After becoming a client of the Rehabilitation Commission a student enters a program of testing and evaluation designed to supplement the evaluation conducted in the Occupational Conditioning Center. A program of training or placement is then planned, based on the total results of the evaluations made. The student may enter a program of training in the sheltered workshop which will lead to placement outside the workshop, or he may be placed in permanent employment in the sheltered workshop itself.

REVIEW OF PROGRESS

At the conclusion of the first year of the program, it was determined that two students (one educable and one trainable) were to be referred to the Rehabilitation Commission. In both cases the clients experienced a successful transition to the industrial environment of the sheltered workshop. After two months time they were placed in the "Occupational Center for Union County" as full time employees and are now functioning successfully in all areas.

Another educable boy was enrolled in the vocational graphic arts program in Union High School. In this program he receives three hours of instruction in graphic arts, as well as three hours instruction in academic areas. His success in the vocational program during the first four months of this school year permitted him to be placed in the cooperative education program where he now works four hours each afternoon in a local printing establishment.

SUMMARY

The success of these three students is an indication that a program of pre-employment training in basic attitude and work skill development results in a smoother and more successful transition into the working force of our society.

The value or success of a program of this type can not be fully evaluated this soon. The results seem to be an indication that the program is effective, but it will take several years of follow-up study before the evaluation can be considered valid.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are deeply indebted to the following people who have worked on the program through its conception, formulation, implimentation, and operation.

Dr. James M. Caulfield, Assistant Superintendent for his interest in the initial planning and completion of the program proposal.

Mr. Joseph R. Kordys', Director of Industrial-Vocational-Technical Education for his assistance in planning the equipment layout, selection and purchasing.

Mr. Frank A. Moretti, Director of Student Personnel Services for his valuable work in the administration of the program as a vital part of the total school program.

Mrs. Gwen McCarthy and Mr. Raymond Ciemnicki, school psychologists, for their work in the development of pre-program testing and evaluations with the students accepted into the Occupational Conditioning Center program.

Mr. Milton Knobler, Director of the Art Department for his assistance with the lay-out and format of the report, as well as the design of the front cover.

Mr. William Kology, counselor for the N. J. Rehabilitation Commission, for his assistance in developing procedures for testing and evaluating students, as well as guidance in referral procedures.

Mr. Robert Cantor, Executive Director of the Occupational Center for Union County for his assistance as a resource person in the implimentation of the various work attitude and skill development areas.

The cooperation we have received from these two outside agencies has helped us solve many of the problems that arose as we entered a new area of service to our students.

This report was produced in the Occupational Conditioning Center under the direction of Joseph E. Beliveau, Instructor. The printing, collating, punching and binding operations were performed by Educable and Trainable Mentally Retarded students enrolled in the program. The Occupational Conditioning Center project was funded through the Programs for Special Needs Students section of the New Jersey Vocational Education Division and Title VI-A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.